

THE "GREAT FISH" IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL STORY  
CORNELIA CATLIN COULTER

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II.—*The "Great Fish" in Ancient and Medieval Story*

CORNELIA CATLIN COULTER

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

In every age of the world, travellers to far off lands have brought back stories of strange peoples and strange customs, of plants and birds and beasts unknown to those who stayed at home. Perhaps no sight has made a stronger appeal to the imagination than an enormous fish, whose vast bulk lay stretched out on the surface of the sea, or who opened his huge jaws to devour smaller creatures. According as the lines of travel moved to the east or to the west and north, he is pictured, now off the coast of India or among the islands of the Southern Pacific, now on the shores of the Baltic; his dimensions and habits are variously described; but always he is an object of terror, and always he lends himself to stories of adventure and romance.

Some reports about the huge size of the creatures in the tropics reached Greece and Rome in classical times. The travels of Herodotus in Asia did not bring him to the sea, but he heard enough about the fauna of India to record his belief that in that country, at the farthest eastern limit of the world, all living creatures, four-footed and winged, grow much larger than in other lands (III, 106). A century later, when several shiploads of Alexander's men went under the command of Nearchus to navigate the ocean from the mouth of the Indus to the head of the Persian Gulf, the sudden spouting of a school of whales so terrified them that the oars dropped from their hands. On the advice of their captain, however, they rowed forward in close array, with loud shouts and the noise of trumpets to accompany the plashing of the oars; and the whales, frightened in turn, plunged into the sea (Arrian, *Indica*, 30; cf. Strabo, xv, 2, 12).

In Rome, in the days of Augustus, when the Emperor's

grandson and prospective heir was about to set out for the East, the Numidian Juba wrote down for the young man, all on fire with excitement as he was (*ardentem fama Arabiae*, Pliny, *H. N.* xii, 55), such information as he could collect about that faraway land, and included a statement about the huge size of the fish in its waters. Pliny takes over this item (*H. N.* xxxii, 10, *Iuba in his voluminibus quae scripsit ad C. Caesarem Augusti filium de Arabia tradit . . . cetos sescentorum pedum longitudinis et trecentorum sexaginta latitudinis in flumen Arabiae intrasse*), and it may have been from some similar source that he drew another sentence of his *Natural History*, in which the acreage of the whale's back, and the measurements of sharks, lobsters, and serpents in the Indian Ocean are estimated (ix, 3, *Plurima autem et maxima animalia in Indico mari, ex quibus balaenae quaternum iugerum, pristis ducenum cubitorum, quippe ubi locustae quaterna cubita impleant, anguillae autem in Gange amne tricenos pedes*). Elsewhere Pliny speaks of the enormous size of tunnies, one of which was found to weigh fifteen talents and to have a tail more than two cubits broad; he also mentions certain great river fish: the *silurus* in the Nile, the *isox* in the Rhine, and the *attilus* in the Po, the last named weighing about one thousand pounds, and so huge that it had to be caught with an iron chain and dragged out of the river by oxen (*H. N.* ix, 15).

Pliny and Juba, in spite of their scientific aims, make some statements that tax the credulity of the reader; and other writers on the great fish are even more ready to admit the marvelous and the romantic to their accounts. A letter purporting to have been written by Alexander to Aristotle, which was probably composed in Egypt in the third century A.D. (Pseudo-Callisthenes, iii, 17), states that the natives of a certain city of India pointed out to Alexander an island off the coast, which they said was the burial place of an ancient king and contained a large quantity of gold. Fearing possible danger, Alexander's devoted friend Philo persuaded him not to undertake the expedition to the island until Philo himself

had made it. "For if I die," said he, "you will have other friends; but if any misfortune overtakes you, the whole world suffers disaster." Alexander watched Philo and his company row away, and, at the end of an hour, land on the supposed island; then the monster (*θηρίον*) suddenly sank into the deep, carrying them all with him.<sup>1</sup>

The germ of the story is probably to be found in an Indian tale of a magic island that caused the disappearance of anyone who landed on it. This tale was repeated to Nearchus by the natives of the coast, and the island, Nosala by name, was pointed out to him, one hundred stades away. When one of his vessels disappeared not far from this island, Nearchus's guides declared that the crew must have unwittingly landed there; however, Nearchus, by sailing to the island and landing in safety, was able to demonstrate that the tale had no foundation (Arrian, *Ind.* 31; cf. Strabo, xv, 2, 13). In Pseudo-Callisthenes, the adventure of Nearchus is combined with the story of a different island, on which stood the monument of King Erythres (cf. Q. Curtius, x, 1, 10-16), and transferred to Alexander; the location of the island is changed to the country of the Prasii near the Ganges (which, as a matter of fact, Alexander never reached); and the incident is given a much more dramatic dénouement.<sup>2</sup>

The disappearing island figures, with even more picturesque details, in the section of the *Talmud* known as "Rabha b. b. Hana's Legends" (the Hagadah at the close of Part I of Tract

<sup>1</sup> The point of the whole story—that the apparent island was really a sea monster—comes out clearly in the Armenian version, but is very obscure in the Greek. See Adolf Ausfeld, *Der griechische Alexanderroman* (Leipzig, 1907), p. 90, n. 7. Julius Zacker, *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Halle, 1867), pp. 147-149, notes that the tale is missing in two of the MSS. of Pseudo-Callisthenes, as well as in the *Historia de Preliis* of the archpresbyter Leo and the Latin *Epistula ad Aristotelem*; and that in one manuscript of Pseudo-Callisthenes, and also in the Jewish history of Gorionides, chap. 11, the sudden sinking of the island has dropped out of the story. Zacker quotes a number of parallels to the tale, which he recognizes as one of the "uralten aus unbekannter Zeit," and concludes that it probably formed part of the original text.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman u. seine Vorläufer* (Leipzig, 1900), p. 191, n. 1; Ausfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-179.

Baba Bathra),<sup>3</sup> which lists numerous marvels seen by the Rabha, several of them prefaced by the words, "When I was on board of a ship." One item tells of "a fish into whose gills a reptile crept from which it died, the sea throwing it out on land. And sixty streets were destroyed by its fall." Another states: "At one time I was on board of a ship, which was driven between two fins of a fish." Then follows the story: "It once happened that I was going on a boat, and saw a fish on which sand was gathered and grass grown thereupon. And we thought that it was an island, descended, baked, and cooked upon it. When the back of the fish grew hot, it turned over, and had not the ship been so near we would have been drowned."

The new features in the last story—the preparations for a meal, the lighting of a fire, and the pain of the monster at the heat—occur, in an entirely different setting, in a hymn of the *Zend-Avesta* (*Yasna*, ix, 10–11), which alludes to an adventure of the hero Keresâspa, "a mightily working youth, curly-haired, carrying a club, who slew the horned monster, the horse-devouring, man-devouring, the poisonous yellow one, over whom flowed yellow poison fathom-deep, on whom Keresâspa was cooking meat with a kettle at noontime. Hot grew this deceiver and began to sweat. Forth from under the kettle rushed he, and upset the boiling water. Aside in terror fled the heroic-spirited Keresâspa."<sup>4</sup> Darmesteter says of the story: "Le texte zend est le spécimen *de terre ferme* le plus ancien du conte de l'île-baleine, avec lequel nous avons tous fait connaissance par les *Mille et une Nuits* et Sindbad le marin. Le texte le plus

<sup>3</sup> *A New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, translated into English by Michael L. Rodkinson (Boston, 1896–1903), vii, pp. 203–213. The incidents here quoted are given on p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Professor R. G. Kent of the University of Pennsylvania for calling my attention to this material, and also for supplying me with the translation here quoted. Another version is given in the translation of the *Zend-Avesta*, Part III, by L. H. Mills (*Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford, 1887), p. 234. See also James Darmesteter's translation of Part II (Oxford, 1883), p. 295, where the same passage appears in a different context.

ancien de la version maritime se trouve dans le Talmud, BABA BATHRA, f. 73 *b*, dans la bouche d'un haggadiste célèbre, Rabba bar bar Hana." He suggests that "l'auteur a peut-être connu l'histoire de Srvara ["horned"] et de Keresâspa; il vivait vers 330, époque où les rapports intellectuels étaient étroits entre les Juifs et les Mages."<sup>5</sup> I am inclined to think that what we have here is not a case of borrowing, but of two narratives derived from the same ultimate source; that the story of someone cooking a meal on a monster's back was a bit of Indo-Persian folklore which the *Avesta* has preserved in its more primitive form; and that the same story, combined with the Indian story of the magic island, was at an early date introduced into a maritime setting and told as one of the marvelous incidents of a voyage.

Rabba b. b. Hana's tale reappears, with variations, in the supposedly scientific work of the Arabian El-Kazweenee (Al-Kazwini), entitled "The Wonders of the World." In his discussion of the tortoise, El-Kazweenee says: "As to the sea-tortoise, it is very enormous, so that the people of the ship imagine that it is an island. One of the merchants hath related, saying, 'We found in the sea an island elevated above the water, having upon it green plants; and we went forth to it, and dug [holes for fire] to cook; whereupon the island moved, and the sailors said, Come ye to your place; for it is a tortoise, and the heat of the fire hath hurt it; lest it carry you away!—By reason of the enormity of its body,' saith he [*i.e.*, the narrator above mentioned,] 'it was as though it were an island; and earth collected upon its back in the length of time, so that it became like land, and produced plants.'" El-Kazweenee also gives various other details about the huge fish in eastern waters. "In the Sea of China," says he, "is a fish more than three hundred cubits long: fear is entertained by the ship on account of it; and it is found by the island of Wák-Wák; and when the people know of its passing by, they

<sup>5</sup> In his note on the French translation (*Annales du Musée Guimet*, xxi, Paris, 1892), I, p. 89. For the story in the *Arabian Nights*, see p. 37 below.

call out, and beat with wood, that it may flee away at their noises: when it raises its fin, it is like an enormous sail." The same writer and Ibn-El-Wardee (Ibnu'l-Wardi) also say that "in the Sea of El-kulzum is an enormous fish, that beateth the ship with its tail, and sinketh it; its length is about two hundred cubits." El-Idreesee (Idrisi) describes a somewhat similar creature in the Sea of China, about one hundred cubits long, called Gheydeh; and mentions the same method of driving it away.<sup>6</sup>

"The Story of Sindbad the Sailor," incorporated in *The Thousand and One Nights*, touches, in three different passages, on the theme of the great fish; and the first two of these passages are obviously very closely connected with the Arabic scientific works just quoted. In the account of his First Voyage (Lane, III, 338), Sindbad says, "I saw, too, in the sea in which is that island, a fish two hundred cubits long, and the fishermen fear it; wherefore they knock some pieces of wood, and it fleeth from them." At an earlier stage in the same voyage, the travellers had arrived at an island covered with trees; the master brought the ship to anchor, and all landed and prepared a fire to cook; then suddenly the master shouted to the passengers to embark in haste, for the apparent island was really a fish. Some of them reached the ship, but the island descended to the bottom of the sea and the others drowned (III, 332-333). The third incident occurs in the Seventh Voyage, as related in the Cairo Edition of *The Thousand and One Nights* (III, 480-482). The vessel on which Sindbad had taken passage had been driven by storm winds to "the Clime of the Kings," in "the furthest of the seas of the world," and the ship's master, discovering what region it was, had prophesied certain death to the passengers, when there suddenly appeared to their terrified gaze three great fish, each one more monstrous than the one before, and the

<sup>6</sup> These statements are quoted from Lane's edition of *The Thousand and One Nights*, III, 434, n. 8; 445, n. 19. Lane thinks that "the Arab geographers applied the name 'Wák-Wák' to all the islands with which they were acquainted on the east and south-east of Borneo." See III, 445, footnote 13; IV, 377, n. 32.

third "darted down to swallow the ship with all that was in her." But just at that moment a great wind arose, which dashed the ship in pieces on a reef; and the fish presumably disappeared; at least there is no further mention of him in the narrative.

This rather large mass of material from Arabic writings shows certain general similarities. In all there is the same emphasis on the size of the fish and the havoc that he can cause, two of the geographers even crediting him with power to sink a ship by the movement of his tail. Both Sindbad and the scientists mention the method of frightening the fish away by beating on pieces of wood, and this scheme corresponds pretty closely to the tactics adopted by Nearchus and his men. The "island" incident, which we found in Pseudo-Callisthenes and the *Talmud*, reappears here, with details very similar to those of the *Talmud*, except that in El-Kazweenee the enormous creature on whose back green plants are growing turns out to be a sea tortoise instead of a fish.<sup>7</sup>

Erwin Rohde discussed this incident, and decided that the coincidences between "The Story of Sindbad" and El-Kazweenee's treatise were such as to indicate the use of a common source rather than direct borrowing of one from the other. He assumed that this source was an earlier Oriental travel-tale; that numbers of such "Reisemärchen" were current in India in early times, and that they passed, first to Persia, through the contacts of Persian and Indian merchants, and then from the Persians to the Arabs.<sup>8</sup> The material thus far presented

<sup>7</sup> The Arabian scientific works in question were written in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. *The Thousand and One Nights*, in the form in which we have it, dates from the second half of the fifteenth century; but this collection seems to have been based on a Persian work called *The Thousand Tales*, which was known as early as 987 A.D., and of course both scientists and story tellers may have drawn from earlier written works or from oral tradition.

<sup>8</sup> Rohde, *Der griechische Roman*, pp. 183-209, especially p. 192, n. 1; pp. 194-196. Rohde notes that the story of the whale-island is found "schon bei Pseudo-Callisthenes," and also in a *märchen* in the *Talmud*, and he suggests that possibly Nearchus's story of an island in the Persian Gulf ἡ ἀφανίζουσα τοὺς προσορμισθέντας (frag. 25, Müller) is due to a misunderstanding of such tales. Cf. p. 34 above.



in this paper lends some support to Rohde's theory. It is significant that the earliest story of the "whale-island" type is localized in India, and that the version in the *Talmud* shares several features with an incident in ancient Persian literature. The form in which the stories are cast also helps to strengthen his hypothesis. Although Rabha b. b. Hana's story of the apparent island is merely one item on a list, and not part of a connected narrative, it is prefaced by the words: "It once happened that I was going on a boat"; and in El-Kazweene's treatise and "The Story of Sindbad" the account of the island is put in the mouth of a merchant.

Indirect evidence of the existence of such tales in the second century A.D. is afforded by Lucian's *True History*. Photius (*Bibl.* p. 111 b) stated that *The Wonders beyond Thule* of Antonius Diogenes seemed to be the source (*πηγή καὶ ρίζα*) of Lucian's work. Lucian himself does not mention Antonius by name, but in the opening chapter he pays his respects to Ctesias, who wrote about India, Iambulus, who describes the countries "in the great sea," and many other authors of the same sort, with their marvelous tales of huge beasts and savage men. He himself, he says, will be more honest than they, for he will at least acknowledge that he is lying. The Greek predecessors of Lucian may have owed something to Oriental travel-tales, as Rohde thought; in any case, Lucian's own narrative bears a general resemblance to "The Story of Sindbad," and two incidents, the adventure with the huge bird and the adventure with the giant fish, deal with very similar material. It seems probable that even in Lucian's time there existed a stock form of travel-tale, in which both these incidents figured. Lucian's boyhood home was in Syria, "the crossroads of the ancient world," and if such tales originated in India and travelled west, they would almost inevitably have been familiar to him.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Professor F. G. Allinson puts the case conservatively in his edition of Lucian (Boston, 1905), p. 55: "More difficult [than an estimate of his debt to classical Greek authors] is the question of Lucian's indebtedness to versions of tales found in the *Arabian Nights* which may have been current in his Syrian

In all the delicious nonsense of the *True History*, there is no section more delightful than the story of the great fish. Lucian and his fifty companions had set sail toward the west from the Pillars of Hercules, and after many exciting adventures (including a visit to the moon) suddenly caught sight of a number of whales and other monsters (*θηρία καὶ κήτη πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα*), the largest of which measured some 1500 stades (about 170 miles) in length. He advanced upon them, jaws wide open and huge teeth shining; they flung their arms about one another and said a last farewell; and the monster swallowed them down, ship and all. His vast interior, with an extensive island formed by the mud that he had swallowed, a forest, and human and animal inhabitants, afforded opportunity for exploration and battle; but in the course of time Lucian wearied of his monotonous existence, and he and his friends determined to make their way out. They first attempted to chop through the whale's right side, but when they had advanced for over half a mile without any results, they changed their plan and set fire to the forest, beginning at the end near his tail. For seven days the fire raged without affecting him; then his strength began to fail, and after five days more the voyagers made their escape by propping his jaws open and dragging their boat through the gaps between his teeth (I, 30-II, 2).

Similar as this whale is to the huge fish of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the whimsical fancy of Lucian has touched the tale with a charm which Sindbad's narrative lacks; and even the incidents of the two stories show important variations. Lucian (presumably following the author of *The Wonders beyond Thule*) locates his adventure in the unknown region to the west of Gibraltar, whereas the scene of Sindbad's mishap is a remote part of the eastern sea. Then, although the picture of the monster bearing down upon the terrified voyagers is home. Certainly the kingfisher (V. H. B 40) and the *rukḥ* in the 'Second Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor' are birds of a feather, and the leviathan fifteen hundred furlongs in length (V. H. A 30), which swallows Lucian's ship, is of the same school with the huge fish of 'Sindbad's Seventh Voyage.'"

the same in both tales, it is only in Lucian's story that the ship is actually engulfed by his huge jaws. Naturally, Sindbad's narrative has no place for the events that follow in *The True History*—the reconnoitering expeditions and the military campaigns inside the fish, and the ultimate escape of the imprisoned travellers.

In giving this turn to the story, Lucian is making use of a very ancient and very widespread motif. The "swallow" type of tale (with a giant, a cow, a wolf, a huge fish or dragon as the swallower) is found all over the world and was probably old even in the days when the *Book of Jonah* was written. Sometimes the story explains some point in the early history of a race; sometimes it forms one of the adventures of a hero, who, by freeing the land from a destructive monster, wins the everlasting gratitude of the people.<sup>10</sup> Frazer, in his discussion of "Jonah and the Whale," summarizes "a less artistic, but equally veracious" story told by the natives of Windesi, on the northern coast of Dutch New Guinea. According to this story, five men in a canoe were swallowed by a whale and sank with him to the bottom of the sea. Then, as they sat in the fish's belly, they cut strips of his liver and guts, hacked the canoe in pieces, and lighting a fire, roasted these strips and ate them. Because of the injury to his vitals, the fish died and drifted to shore, and the men then opened his snout and came out. Thereupon a hornbill bade them bring their people to this land and settle there.<sup>11</sup> In a Melanesian tale, Kamakajaku is swallowed by a fish, which carries him to the sun-rising, where he cuts his way through with a piece of obsidian; he then follows the sun to a village in the sky, where he teaches the sun's children to make a fire and cook food.<sup>12</sup> One version of the Hesione story, which is found as early as the fifth century B.C., made Herakles descend into the belly of the monster, where his hair was singed by the intense heat,

<sup>10</sup> For a general discussion of this type of tale, see J. A. Macculloch, *The Childhood of Fiction* (London, 1905), pp. 47-51.

<sup>11</sup> J. G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament* (London, 1919), III, pp. 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> Macculloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 436-437.

and kill it by hacking its sides (Hellanicus, frag. 136, Müller; Lycophron, *Alex.* 31-37, 468-478).<sup>13</sup> In the very similar story of Assiepattle and the Stoor Worm, told by the Scots but derived from Scandinavian sources, a great Stoor Worm which came to ravage the land was fed once a week with seven virgins. The king's daughter was offered, but rescued by Assiepattle, who allowed his boat to glide down the dragon's huge throat, and then put a burning peat in its liver, escaping as quickly as he could.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that where Assiepattle uses a burning peat, Herakles and the Melanesian hero bring about the monster's death by cutting; in the Windesi story the two methods are combined; and Lucian has his imprisoned voyagers try first one and then the other.

Not all tales of the "swallow" type, however, show heroes as active as these. The *Book of Jonah* states very simply that when, at the end of three days and three nights, Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, "the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." A story told by the Indians of the Canadian Northwest, to which the collector, M. Émile Petitot, gives the secondary title, "le Jonas flanc-de-chien," and of which he says, "C'est du Pacifique que le mythe est parvenu sur le continent colombien," contains more picturesque details. In one version, a young man is swallowed by a fish and suffers for three days in the monster's burning vitals;<sup>15</sup> then the fish approaches the shore where the young man's sister is lamenting him, and he calls out to her to throw her "soulier" to the monster,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Macculloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-389. Weicker, in the article on Hesione, in Pauly-Wissowa, VIII, 1240-1242, regards this adventure as "ein selbständiger Agon des Helden, eine hochaltertümliche Fassung der Bezwingung des Todes." The scholiast referred the epithet *τριεσπέρου* in *Alex.* 33 to the "long night" in which Zeus begot Herakles, *τρεῖς ἑσπέρας εἰς μίαν μεταβαλὼν*, and editors of Lycophron have generally followed this interpretation. Weicker, however, takes the word to mean "dass Herakles drei Tage im Bauche verweilt"; and his view gains support from the "three days and three nights" of *Jonah*, I, 17; *Matt.* XII, 40, and from parallels in other folklore.

<sup>14</sup> Macculloch, *op. cit.*, p. 49, n. 2; p. 402.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the story of Herakles, p. 41 above.

keeping tight hold of the "cordons" meanwhile; this she does, the fish greedily snapped up the bait, the young man seized it, and, as she drew the string, "elle contraignit le monstre à revomir son frère."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in a Syrian folktale, a certain handsome Jûsif was swallowed by the same fish that had previously swallowed a maiden, and was disgorged on the shore a year later, pulling the maiden out after him.<sup>17</sup>

In some stories, the person swallowed is discovered by accident when the fish is cut open, as a ring, similarly devoured, might be—as a ring actually is, indeed, in the story of Poly-crates (Herodotus, III, 41-42) and in Kalidasa's drama *Śakuntala*. This is the case in a large number of Indian tales. The *Vishṇu Purāṇa* tells how Pradyumna was stolen when only six days old and cast into a whirlpool of roaring waves, the haunt of the huge creatures of the deep; a large fish swallowed the child, but he did not die; when the fish was caught and cut open he was found inside, "a beautiful child, looking like a new shoot of the blighted tree of love."<sup>18</sup> Similarly Śaktideva, in Somadeva's story of the Golden City, was shipwrecked and swallowed by a large fish (fortunately with no injury to his limbs); when the servants of the King Fisher caught the fish and cut it open, he came forth alive. "The Story of Bhīmabhaṭa" and "The Story of Keṣaṭa and Kandarpa," in a later section of Somadeva's book, tell respectively of the rescue of a young Brahman and of a woman named Sumanas from the belly of a fish. The Brahman says of his sojourn in the fish that he remained for a long time "inside the capacious habitation of his stomach, eating in my hunger his flesh, which I cut off with a knife," but there is no hint that the fish suffered any discomfort from this treatment. "The Story of the Two Princesses," also in Somadeva's collection,

<sup>16</sup> Émile Petitot, *Traditions Indiennes du Canada Nord-Ouest (Les Littératures Populaires, xxiii)*, Paris, 1886), pp. 319-321. In a variant, the sister does not appear, but the fish, "de douleur, se jeta sur un récif et y rendit sa proie vivante."

<sup>17</sup> Eugen Prym and Albert Socin, *Der Neu-Aramäische Dialekt* (Göttingen, 1881), Part 2, *Übersetzung: Syrische Sagen u. Märchen*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>18</sup> *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, tr. H. H. Wilson (London, 1864-1877), v, 27.

narrates an even more exciting adventure. Holy seers had announced that a certain beautiful princess should have as her husband the lord of seven *dvīpas*, and her father, deciding that King Vikramāditya would be a suitable match, had made her embark on a ship, with her retinue and wealth, and sent her off. But the ship, with the princess and her followers on board, was swallowed by a large fish. When the fish was thrown up on the coast by the current, the people of the neighborhood killed it and cut it open, and the ship full of people came out. The king of the country discovered that the princess was his niece, and sent her, together with his own daughter, whom he had long intended to give to King Vikramāditya, to the bridegroom.<sup>19</sup>

When we pass from Eastern tales and notices in Greek and Roman writers to the literature of Western Europe in the Middle Ages, we find the "great fish" still popular, and the same principal types of story—the "island" type and the "swallow" type—still persisting. The medieval bestiaries take the whale as the type of the evil one, with his treacherous wiles, and tell how unsuspecting mariners, seeing the whale's back rising above the sea, cast anchor and build a fire upon it, and then the whale sinks to the bottom and drowns them all.<sup>20</sup>

*The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, which narrates the experiences of a holy Irish monk and his followers in the Atlantic, contains some adventures very similar to those of Sindbad in the eastern sea. The mishap on the supposed island occurs in both the

<sup>19</sup> The story of Śaktideva is found in Penzer's edition of Tawney's translation of *The Ocean of Story* (London, 1924- ), II, 192-193; the other stories have not yet been printed in Penzer's edition, but are to be found in the original edition of Tawney's translation, II, 220-224; 605-606; 598-599. In two of the stories, the fish is stranded in the Ganges—a detail which recalls Pliny's statement about the huge fish that entered "the river of Arabia." Cf. p. 33 above.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *Le Bestiaire* of Guillaume le Clerc, composed in 1210 (ed. Robert Reinsch, Leipzig, 1890), ll. 2239-2280; and the thirteenth century bestiary included in *An Old English Miscellany* (ed. Richard Morris, Early English Text Society, London, 1872), pp. 16-18. The Latin poem *Physiologus* of Theobaldus, from which this bestiary is translated, is given in App. I, pp. 201-209; the section on the whale is found on p. 206, ll. 193-222.

prose and the metrical versions of the *Voyage*, and the prose version adds the information that the fish is named Jasconius (Jascom), and that he labors night and day to put his tail in his mouth, but can not do so because of his great size.<sup>21</sup>

When, about the middle of the sixteenth century, Olaus Magnus wrote of the wonders of his native Scandinavia, he mentioned the fish that sometimes cast his weight on the stern or prow of a ship and sank it, or overturned the vessel with his back or tail, and he also told of the whale whose back looked like an island:<sup>22</sup>

Habet etiam cetus super corium suum superficiem tanquam sabulum, quod est iuxta littus maris: unde plerumque elevato dorso suo super undas, a navigantibus nihil aliud creditur esse, quam insula. Itaque nautae ad illum appellant, et super eum descendunt, inque ipsum palos figunt, naves alligunt, focos pro cibis coquendis accendunt: donec tandem cetus sentiens ignem sese in profundum mergat, atque in eius dorso manentes, nisi funibus a navi protensis se liberare queant, submergantur. . . . Arenas aliquando dorso sustollit, in quibus ingruente tempestate . . . nautae, terram se invenisse gaudentes, anchoris demissis falsa firmitate quiescunt, ac ignes accensos belua sentiens, subito com-

<sup>21</sup> See *Acta Sancti Brendani*, ed. P. F. Moran (Dublin, 1872), pp. 55-56 (the metrical life) and p. 97 (the prose version); and the fourteenth century English version printed in vol. xiv of the Percy Society Publications, under the title, *St. Brandan: A Mediaeval Legend of the Sea*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1844), pp. 7-8, 39. Wright notes that there are "several remarkable points of similarity between St. Brandan and the Sinbad of the Arabian Nights," and that "at least one incident in the two narratives is identical—that of the disaster on the back of the great fish." (Pref., p. v; cf. pp. 59-60).

<sup>22</sup> Olaus Magnus, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (Rome, 1555), xxi, 6; xxi, 25. The latter section is quoted by Pontoppidan, Bishop of Bergen, in his *Natural History of Norway* (translated from the Danish original, London, 1755), II, 8, § 13. Pontoppidan dismisses the tale as a ridiculous fabrication, due to incomplete information about the huge fish called Kraken. This Kraken, he says, is the largest and most extraordinary of all the animal creation; its back or upper part is about 1½ English miles in circumference, and it looks at first sight like a number of small islands surrounded with sea-weed; its arms are strong enough to pull down the largest man-of-war; it has a strong scent, and emits a dark secretion which colors the water (§§ 11-12). Modern scientists have assumed that the Bishop was describing some enormous species of cuttle-fish.

mota se in aquis mergit, hominesque cum navibus, nisi anchorae rumpantur, in profundum attrahit.

It is Olaus's picture of the stormtossed sailor anchoring beside the whale that Milton uses in a simile in *Paradise Lost*, I, 201–208, where Satan lies floating on the burning lake, huge in bulk as Briareos,

Or that sea-beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream.  
Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,  
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff  
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind,  
Moors by his side under the lee, while night  
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays.

In the account of the creation of living things in the sea, too, Milton writes (*Paradise Lost*, VII, 412–415):

There leviathan,  
Hugest of living creatures, on the deep  
Stretched like a promontory, sleeps or swims,  
And seems a moving land.

The “swallow” *motif* also appears in medieval literature. It is delightfully employed in the poem “Patience,” written in the northwest Midland district in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, where Jonah is introduced into the homily by way of illustration. To the simple outline of the Biblical story the author adds some charming touches—the space as broad as a hall which Jonah enters, the prophet getting a firm foothold in the whale’s stomach and peering about “vche a nok of his nauel,” and the painful uneasiness that this “mote in his mawe” caused the huge creature.<sup>23</sup>

*The Voyage of Saint Brendan* borrows from the story of Sindbad not only the whale-island incident, but the encounter with a huge fish that threatens to swallow the ship. As

<sup>23</sup> *Patience; An Alliterative Version of Jonah by the Poet of the Pearl*, ed. Israel Gollancz (Oxford, 1924).



Brendan and his followers were sailing in a violent storm, a great fish came after them, casting burning foam out of his mouth, and raising the water higher than the ship at each blast. The monks, aghast, called "on Jhesu Crist, and in seint Brendan also." Then, as the fish was just about to seize them, another great fish came out of the west, smote the first in three pieces, and swam away again.<sup>24</sup>

A story of the *Gesta Romanorum*<sup>25</sup> introduces the "great fish" in still another setting. A certain king, in order to secure peace between himself and the Emperor Honorius, had arranged for the marriage of his daughter and the Emperor's son; the princess took ship for the Emperor's country, had the misfortune (along with the vessel and all its passengers) to be swallowed by a whale, but ultimately escaped, passed the Emperor's test of a choice between three caskets, and so in the end was happily united to his son. The last incident in the story seems to be the remote source for the trial of Portia's suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*, and has therefore been discussed at some length by Shakespearean scholars;<sup>26</sup> the adventure with the whale, which is equally

<sup>24</sup> See Wright's edition of the English metrical version, p. 19; prose version, pp. 46-47; and Moran's edition of the *Acta Sancti Brendani*, pp. 63-64, 111-112.

<sup>25</sup> Hermann Oesterley, *Gesta Romanorum* (Berlin, 1872), No. 251, app. 55. Oesterley apparently found the story in at least six 15th century MSS. in German libraries. (See p. 62, No. 83; p. 94, No. 79; p. 119, No. 70; p. 158, No. 218; p. 162, No. 26; p. 164, No. 23.) A variant, differing in the names of the characters and in a number of other details, appears as No. 99 of the Anglo-Latin text (translation quoted in the Introduction to Swan's edition, reprinted with a preface by E. A. Baker, London, 1924, pp. 40-44); No. 66 of the English MS. Harl. 7333 (S. J. H. Herrtage, *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, Early English Text Society, London, 1879, pp. 294-306); and No. 32 in Wynkyn de Worde's translation (quoted, from the re-issue of Richard Robinson, in H. H. Furness's Variorum Edition of *The Merchant of Venice*, Philadelphia, 1888, pp. 315-316). The present quotation follows the text in C. H. Beeson's *Primer of Medieval Latin* (Chicago, 1925), pp. 62-63, except in the first line, where I have retained the reading *cele grande eis* of Oesterley's text.

<sup>26</sup> *E.g.* Francis Douce, *Illustrations of Shakespeare* (London, 1807), I, 278; I, 414-415; Furness, Variorum Ed. of *Merch. of Ven.*, pp. 314-319; H. R. D. Anders, *Shakespeare's Books* (Berlin, 1904), p. 65.

interesting, has received practically no attention.<sup>27</sup> It runs as follows:

Cum autem per mare navigarent, cete grande eis occurrebat in mare et navem deglutire volebat. Nautae hoc percipientes timuerunt valde et praecipue puella. Nautae vero ignem copiosum fecerunt et die ac nocte vigilabant. Sed accidit post triduum quod, fessi propter magnas vigilias, dormierunt. Cete subito navem cum omnibus contentis deglutivit. Puella cum intellexit quod in ventre ceti esset fortiter clamabat. Ad cuius clamorem omnes excitati sunt. Nautae vero puellae dixerunt ac militibus: "Carissimi, estote confortati; Deus nos salvabit; habeamus bonum consilium, quia sumus in ventre ceti." Ait puella: "Audite consilium meum et erimus salvati." Qui dixerunt: "Dic." Quae ait: "Accendamus ignem in magna copia et cete quilibet vulneret sicut profundius possit et per ista duo mortem recipiet et statim ad terram natabit et sic per gratiam Dei evadere poterimus." Illi vero consilium puellae per omnia impleverunt. Cete cum mortem sensit ad terram perrexit. Iuxta quam terram erat quidam miles manens, qui cena facta versus litus maris ambulavit. Cum ergo cete hinc inde natate vidisset et terrae appropinquare, servos vocat et cete ad terram traxit. Qui incepterunt cum instrumentis percutere. Puella cum sonitum audisset, loquebatur pro omnibus et ait: "Carissimi, suaviter percutite et latus ceti aperite; hic sumus in eius ventre filii bonorum virorum de generoso sanguine." Miles cum vocem puellae audisset ait servis suis: "Carissimi, latus ceti aperite et videamus quid lateat interius." Cum vero apertum fuisset, puella primo exivit immo quasi mortua, deinde milites et ceteri alii.

The story is obviously the same as that of the princess intended as a bride for King Vikramāditya (p. 44 above), but shows a few marked variations. Somadeva's story is told from the point of view of the spectators who hauled the fish up and cut it open; there is comparatively little interest in the shipload of people inside the fish, and no indication that they exerted themselves to better their plight. The people in the *Gesta*, on the other hand, are resourceful and energetic,

<sup>27</sup> A footnote in Tawney's edition of *The Ocean of Story*, II, 224, cites No. 66 of the English *Gesta* as a parallel to "The Story of Bhīma-bhata." The tale in the *Gesta* is really much closer to "The Story of the Two Princesses" than to the one on which Tawney gives the note.

and the leading part in the planning and in the appeal for help is taken by the princess. Moreover, the two methods that she suggests for bringing about the death of the fish (lighting a great fire and wounding him as deeply as possible) are found, as we have seen, in a large number of folk-tales, and occur in combination both in a Windesi story and in Lucian's *True History*.<sup>28</sup>

From what source these details were drawn it is impossible to tell. Direct borrowing from Lucian is of course out of the question, for the medieval story-writers were in no position to read Greek; and in view of the widespread popularity of the "swallow" motif it is not necessary even to assume indirect influence of the *True History* on the *Gesta Romanorum*.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the source, the medieval writer has done a service in preserving for us two ancient methods of doing the fish to death, and also in replacing the passive heroine of the Indian story by a quick-witted, energetic young woman who is more in accord with Western ideals.

As we pass in review the numerous stories of the "great fish," it is evident that they are not confined to any one country or to any one historical period. India (as was per-

<sup>28</sup> In the variants mentioned in n. 25 the supernatural element tends to decrease and the princess becomes even more the central figure of the tale. Her attendants lose their lives in a storm, and she herself is left alone on the sinking ship; she builds a fire and so keeps the monster at bay for a time, but when her eyes close with weariness he devours her. "Both þe ship and þe mayde" are swallowed in Harl. 7333, but in the second version quoted by Herrtage (Addit. MS. 9066), the Anglo-Latin version, and the translation of Wynkyn de Worde, the ship is ignored. Also, the kindling of a fire in the whale's belly, though it is mentioned in these versions, seems to be a matter of much less importance than the wound inflicted on him "with a litill knyfe."

<sup>29</sup> It should be remembered, however, that Lucian was repeatedly imitated in the literature of the Eastern Empire (see Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (München, 1891), pp. 188, 193, 210, etc.); and that when Liudprand, tenth century Bishop of Cremona, went as imperial ambassador to Constantinople and came home with a stock of Greek phrases, Lucian's *Dream* (also known as *The Cock*) was among the works that he had learned to quote. See Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, I, 12 (*Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*, *Liudprandi Opera*, Hannover u. Leipzig, 1915), where Gallus 1 is quoted, καθὼς ὁ Λουκιανός.

haps natural, in view of the actual existence of large fish in her waters and the fondness of her people for marvelous tales) seems to have been peculiarly rich in them. In India two definite types of story apparently developed, the "island" type and the "swallow" type, both of which spread westward and left their mark in turn on Greek, Arabic, medieval Latin, and the vernacular literatures. The whale-island story is repeated almost without change as late as the sixteenth century, and survives in literary allusion for two hundred years more; the "swallow" tale loses its romantic conclusion in "The Story of Sindbad," and passes in this abridged form to *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*; the form of the tale in which the swallowing actually occurs is, however, parodied with great zest by Lucian, and reappears in the Middle-English alliterative poem "Patience" and in a story of the *Gesta Romanorum*.